

Exhibit No. 8Date 1-21-09Bill No. SB 235

January 20, 2009

To State of Montana Senate Members Terry Murphy, Roy Brown, Greg Hinkle, Carol Juneau, Cliff Larsen, Dave Lewis, Trudi Schmidt

From **Cathy Jenni, Ph.D.**, Professor, Counselor Education, The University of Montana

Re: SB 235/LC 1889

I began my career as an assistant professor and Director and later Department Chair of Counselor Education in August 1990. Over the nearly 20 years since then, the Counselor Education Program at The University of Montana has graduated approximately 250 graduate students in mental health counseling and school counseling.

Most of our graduates have remained in Montana, licensed as school counselors and/or Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors. They have found successful careers working with families, youth, addictions, in the schools from the earliest years of life to professional clinical counseling work in our Universities and colleges. They provide services to individuals and families living through death and divorce, domestic and sexual violence, loss of employment, chronic mental illness and other life challenges and transitions. Many of our students, about one in five, are from minority groups, primarily Montana's Native Americans people. All have, since graduation, counseled underrepresented groups with needed services and as mentors to the next generations. Our graduates, as is also true of the graduates of MSU Bozeman, are widely respected across our state. I'm tremendously proud of the graduate students I've been privileged to work with. I see them often at professional meetings and continuing education trainings. Reconnecting is always a joy!

The Counselor Education Program at The University of Montana is nationally accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP), as is the similar program at MSU-Bozeman. This is quite an honor to the State of Montana. Less than one third of Professional Counseling graduate programs are nationally accredited. Accreditation is based on meeting all CACREP Standards. Within CACREP are eight required Foundational Areas, one of which is Assessment. It is this Foundational Area that I wish to address in relationship to SB 235/LC 1889. I am representing myself in this letter, both as a longtime Counselor Educator, an LCPC and a leader in high quality training for master's level mental health professionals. I regret that I cannot be present at the hearing on Wednesday, January 21, 2009. I am in Berkeley, California on a one-semester sabbatical leave for Spring 2009.

Students who graduate from CACREP-approved programs have a basic foundation in assessment (see endnote). Please also note that not all LCPC's nationally or in Montana have graduated from CACREP-approved, nationally accredited programs, though a substantial number of Montana LCPC's have graduated from The University of Montana or MSU-Bozeman. Our intention in providing the Assessment foundational area is so that LCPC's and School Counselors are professionally competent to receive and consider psychological evaluations. They use these in developing a treatment or educational plan for clients in the community or students in school settings. You will note that the professional

expectations in assessment are high (see endnote). **However, we do not train our graduates to professionally conduct psychological assessments. This is a detailed, complex service that requires additional course work (particularly in projective tests and personality testing and evaluation) and considerable additional focused clinical supervision.**

The forgoing statement does not imply that LCPC's could not develop these skills with post-graduate training. However, they do not have the full complement of evaluative skills at graduation. As in other areas--such as addiction treatment or work with certain populations, such as sex offenders, trauma survivors, or the chronically mentally ill—additional, post-graduate specialization is necessary. To be more specific:

Counselor Educators define "assessment" techniques as: (1) Selecting, administering, scoring, and interpreting instruments designed to assess an individual's aptitudes, attitudes, abilities, achievements, interests, and personal characteristics, and (2) using non-standardized methods and techniques for understanding human behavior in relation to coping with, adapting to, or changing life situations. **Specifically, appraisal, another word we use for assessment, refers to informal assessment of client problems or the use of rating scales that produce single scores with very specific interpretations. (Society for Personality Assessment 2006).**

Psychological evaluation/assessment is a complex task that involves the integration of information from multiple sources, including psychological tests, to answer complex clinical questions. "Assessment techniques" as professional counselors use these, do not include instruments that require specialized psychological training for administration and interpretation unless the licensed counselor or therapist has completed additional training beyond that available in the two year Mental Health Counseling program. (Society for Personality Assessment 2006).

In order for LCPCs to conduct psychological assessment, there would need to be a professional credentialing process that would include additional **specific criteria and training** consistent with the guidelines for training in assessment developed by the American Psychological Association (Turner et al., 2001). This would include additional coursework and supervised experience.

SB 235/LC 1889 is alarming in that it extends the use of the term "psychological" (and other closely related terms) to various professions, including but not limited to attorneys, pastoral counselors, physicians and others who are unlikely to have the basic assessment training that Professional Counseling graduates of CACREP-approved programs obtain during their studies—which are themselves a good beginning but not sufficient.

Continuing education training and personal experience would not be sufficient either.

The principal reason for licensure in the various professions and occupations is protection of the public. Licensing statutes specify required training and the "scope of practice." Because the bill does not specify the means by which a person would demonstrate the competencies necessary to engage in conducting psychological assessments, there is considerable potential risk to the public if SB 235 were to become law. Psychological reports are often critical information in criminal and civil legal judgments, placement in specific educational settings and programs, healthcare and rehabilitation services. These are decisions that can determine the life course of a person and his or her family. They have a serious impact on lives.

It is also important to note that the Code of Ethics (2005) American Counseling Association, states that, "Counselors utilize only those tests and assessment services for which they have been trained and are competent" (Section E.2.a. Limits of Competence). Without the additional training noted above, I view psychological assessment as outside the expertise of the graduates from our program. The Counselor Education program at The University of Montana is a very full program, and necessarily so. We train our students in psychotherapy skills (they complete at least 1000 hours of supervised experience), group counseling skills, addiction counseling, career counseling, multicultural counseling, counseling ethics and professional development, community mental health issues, assessment, family counseling, utilizing the DSM-IV for diagnosis and treatment planning, human development and lifespan counseling, working with children and adolescents, and research theory and practice. We have a demanding and lengthy graduate program that forms a fantastic platform for further professional development after graduation!

My grave concern is that SB 235/LC 1889 does not specify by what process individuals in the various professions mentioned in the bill could demonstrate the additional, post degree qualifications and experience necessary to conduct high quality psychological assessments. Such qualifications would vary by the licensee's previous training. As well, it is unlikely that members of the Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors are themselves credentialed in psychological assessment because it lies outside the usual training of most master's level Clinical Counselors or Clinical Social Workers.

I urge you to defeat this bill. It is seriously flawed by its breath as well as by its lack of specificity as to the additional training necessary. Please feel free to contact me if you wish.

Thank you for your time on this important matter.

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References:

Turner, S.M., DeMers, S.T., Fox, H.R., & Reed, G.M. (2001). APA's guidelines for test user qualifications: An executive summary. *American Psychologist*, 56, 1099-1113.

Standards for Education and Training in Psychological Assessment: Position of the Society for Personality Assessment. An Official Statement of the Board of Trustees of the Society for Personality Assessment. (2006). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 87(3), 355-357

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- i 7. ASSESSMENT - studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation, including all of the following:
- a. historical perspectives concerning the nature and meaning of assessment;
 - b. basic concepts of standardized and nonstandardized testing and other assessment techniques including norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessment, environmental assessment, performance assessment, individual and group test and inventory methods, behavioral observations, and computer-managed and computer-assisted methods;
 - c. statistical concepts, including scales of measurement, measure of central tendency, indices of variability, shapes and types of distributions, and correlations;
 - d. Reliability (i.e., theory of measurement error, models of reliability, and the use of reliability information);
 - e. validity (i.e., evidence of validity, types of validity, and the relationship between reliability and validity);
 - f. age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, disability, culture, spirituality, and other factors related to the assessment and evaluation of individuals, groups, and specific populations;
 - g. strategies for selecting, administering, and interpreting assessment and evaluation instruments and techniques in counseling;
 - h. an understanding of general principles and methods of case conceptualization, assessment, and/or diagnoses of mental and emotional status; and

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- i. ethical and legal considerations.